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CONTENTS

10. WHY DO WE NEED EVALUATION DEVICES ANYWAY?*

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INTRODUCTION: EVALUATION AND STORIES

The theory of evaluation devices has been one of the most influential theories in the area of narrative structure and comprehension. Labov's (1972) seminal study of the phenomenon has generated a huge amount of research regarding the use of evaluation devices in various social contexts, (Polanyi 1978), in literary as well as non-literary narratives (e.g., Reinhart, 1995, Shen, 1985), and in its role in development (e.g., Peterson & McCabe, 1983).

In general, this theory, which forms part of Labov's theory of oral narratives, assumes that relating the sequence of events is not the only function the story fulfills. Another central function is the evaluative function, i.e., conveying to the reader the purpose or the 'point' of the story – its raison d'etre, why it is being told at all, and what the narrator intends. This function is essential, since the sequence of events by itself is not necessarily interesting. Furthermore, the sequence does not allow one to infer the story's raison d'etre, a function fulfilled by what Labov defines as evaluation devices.

Most studies of these evaluation devices have focused on their formal aspects as well as on their distribution along the text continuum (e.g., Labov, 1972; Polanyi, 1978). However, the very function of "evaluation" remains somewhat vague. What exactly does one mean by the idea of "signalling the 'point' of the story", or it's raison d'etre? I would like to elaborate on various aspects of the evaluative function.

EVALUATION DEVICES THEORY: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Let me start (for the sake of readers less acquainted with Labov's notions), with a brief description of the major evaluation devices. (The reader familiar with these devices may skip the present section). This brief description is based on Reinhart (1995), who introduces a redivision of Labov's original set of evaluation devices. Recall that Labov's general distinction is between **external evaluations** (that is, direct commentary of the narrator about the importance of a certain event), and **internal** ones. The latter consist of two major groups (see Reinhart, 1995), namely, **I. Equivalence; II. Comparatives**

I. Equivalence;

1. **Equivalences** are of two sorts: (a) semantic equivalences: e.g., synonyms, and (b) repetitions, e.g., lexical repetitions of the same lexical item, syntactic and prosodic repetitions. These repetitions stress certain meanings which are thus marked and can be assigned to the neutral events in the story. Consider, for example, the following sentences excerpted from a fight story generated by one of Labov's informants (that will be analyzed later on). These sentences are full of lexical, syntactic and semantic repetitions (bolded in the following pairs of sentences):

JJ **I tried to kill 'im—over one cigarette!**   KK **I tried to kill 'im.** Square business

Or:

MM You know, all of a sudden **I went crazy!**   NN **I jus' went crazy.**

Or:

OO An' I jus' **wouldn't stop hittin** the motherfucker.
PP Dig it, **I couldn't stop hittin' 'im**, man, till the teacher pulled me off o' him.

II. Comparatives

II. **Comparatives** are of two sorts: (a) metaphorical expressions in which there is a comparison between two states or objects, one of which actually exists, and (b) modalities, a term referring to comparisons between an actual state and a state which is wished for, feared, existed in the past, or is morally condemned, etc. Both in metaphorical expressions and modalities, the actual situation (state or event) is evaluated by the non-existing situation through the comparison. For example, an actual event is interpreted not merely as a neutral event – which would be the case without the comparison – but rather as one which has never happened, or a highly desired one, etc. This is the sense of evaluation used here. For example, in the previously mentioned story one of the characters says:

• I mean – I mean we **supposed** to be brothers, an' shit . . . "

Here, the speaker compares the actual state (in which he refuses to share his last cigarette with his rival) with a state he wishes for (in which the narrator would share with him the cigarette). Furthermore, this sentence also uses a metaphorical comparison between the relation he expects to have with the narrator and that between two brothers.

Distribution of the evaluation devices: the evaluation focus

Another major characteristic of the use of evaluative devices, has to do with their distribution in the text. Labov points out that evaluative devices, tend to be concentrated in specific regions of the story, notably, between the complicating event of the story and its resolution. These concentrations can be called "the evaluation focus" (see Labov, 1972; Reinhart, 1995).

The function of evaluation devices: Reinhart's distinction between narrative and thematic 'point'

A systematic attempt to address the issue of defining the evaluative function in more precise terms has been proposed by Reinhart (1995). In this study Reinhart, who further developed the study of evaluation devices and their function, classifies these devices in a somewhat different manner than that of Labov. Moreover, Reinhart suggests a sharper distinction between two basic functions of the evaluation mechanism (not distinguished explicitly by Labov or by Polanyi (1978), who developed Labov's theory): 1. building (or marking) the meaning of the story. Since the assumption is that events by themselves are usually neutral, we need devices to mark their meaning. 2. marking the important (or central) points in the sequence of events. These points are marked by what might be called evaluation focus, i.e., a concentration of evolution devices at a given point which specify the point as an important one.

This proposal undoubtably makes some progress towards clarifying the notion of the story point. However, let me point out that further clarification and elaboration of this notion is required, given the complex nature of the notion of the story 'point'. In particular, I would like to address the following question: why do readers need linguistic-textual markers for the construction of the thematic and narrative points of the story?

Why do readers need evaluation devices for constructing the thematic and narrative points of the story

Let me start by addressing this issue with respect to the 'narrative point'. The 'narrative point' can roughly be described as revolving around the main or important events of the story. The 'important' or 'central' events in the story are better recalled in memory, comprise summaries of stories, and, constitute the discourse topic of stories (as argued in van-Dijk, 1980; Shen, 1988, 1989, and so forth).

This last notion, the Discourse Topic (DT), namely, what the discourse is "about", is central to theories of discourse processing. Following van-Dijk (1980), Giora (1985) it is assumed that the DT functions as an information organizer throughout the processing of discourse, and is based on processes of abstraction and summarization of the story events. Consider, for example, the following typical story:

There was once a king who had three lovely daughters. One day, the daughters went walking in the woods. They were enjoying themselves so much that they forgot the time and stayed too long. A dragon kidnapped the three daughters. As they were being dragged off , they called for help. Three heroes heard the cries and decided to rescue the daughters. The heroes came and fought the dragon. They killed the dragon and

rescued the maidens. The heroes then returned the daughters safely to their palace. When the Czar heard of the rescue, he rewarded the heroes handsomely.

Arguably, the central events of the story, those that might constitute its 'narrative point', are the kidnapping of the girls by the dragon and their rescue by the three heroes. So, from the standpoint of its narrative structure, the story could be described as something like: "the kidnapping of the girls and the rescue" or similar descriptions.

Under various cognitive and structuralist theories of story (e.g., Rumelhart 1975; 1977; van-Dijk 1980 inter alia) what makes these events central has to do with the role they play in the story schema. These theories assume that underlying short stories is a schema, comprising a SETTING, followed by an INITIATING EVENT (in this case the kidnapping of the girls by the dragon) that triggers the plot by creating a PROBLEM (how the girls are to be saved) for the protagonist (the three heroes), followed by an ATTEMPT to solve this problem (the heroes' fight against the dragon), yielding a certain (positive or negative) OUTCOME (the heroes rescue the girls). Now the major components of this schema are the initiating event and the final outcome (see Shen 1988; 1989 for an elaboration of this point). These will be better recalled, and are more likely (compared with other events in the story) to become part of the discourse topic of the story in question.

The important point (no pun intended) to note here is that the 'narrative point' is being derived from the actual events and the role they play in the schema. In other words, under this view, the 'narrative point' and its derivation by the reader relies on the structural organization of the story events, and is totally unrelated to the linguistic instantiation or realization of that set of events. This is typical of many traditional theories of story structure and comprehension (mainly within the structuralist school (Prince, 1973), story grammar approaches (Rumelhart, 1975; van Dijk & Kintch, 1977; Mandler & Johnson, 1977), and artificial intelligence approaches (e.g., Wilensky, 1982)). The reader may recall that these theories assume a distinction between the 'expression' or 'surface' level of the text (a level that includes linguistic aspects, order of presentation and so forth), and the "story", that is the structure of events. Thus, a given story can be narrated in various ways, namely, in various orders of presentation, and in alternative verbal (or for that matter non-verbal) modes, but still remain the same "story". In this view, theories dealing with story structure do not include reference to the "expression level" (e.g. Prince, 1973: 13).

Therefore, since the "expression level" is not an integral part of the story per se, and since we can assume, as do these theories, that part of the narrative-structure description (in Prince's terms the story grammar) has to reflect the hierarchical organization of narrative units, we can conclude that the hierarchical organization is not dependent on such elements as evaluation devices.

Turning back to the issue of the evaluative function, which clearly belongs to the 'expression level' of the text, the question that now arises is: if the reader can derive (at least for simple narratives) the major events (and episodes) on the basis of structural considerations, are the evaluation devices redundant (at least regarding their 'narrative point markings' function)?

What I would like to propose is that (contrary to the view that evaluation devices are redundant) evaluation devices play a significant and indispensable role both at the level of 'narrative point marking' function, as well as two other levels of the 'point', namely, the 'thematic' and 'affective' points of the stories.

NARRATIVE AMBIGUITY

The above position applies to the kind of stories told by Labov's informants. Note that the important events in those stories are not important due to their content (although this also might in some cases be the case), but rather due to the position they occupy in the structural organization of the story. For example, in many of the stories analyzed by Labov the central events revolves around those action(s) which directly reflect the 'conflict' between the narrator and its opponent.

However, in many other cases, this structural organization cannot yield a clear-cut hierarchical organization of the story events. A case in point is what might be called 'narrative ambiguity' (see Shen, 1985, 2002). These are cases in which the same set of events can be organized along two (or even more) narrative structures, and the evaluative devices signal the reader which of these several structures is the relevant one, and thus, "disambiguate" the story. A case in point is the following Jewish folk tale in the oral tradition, told by a Libyan Jew which relates the events that have to do with the attempt by a group of Arab fishermen to kill a Jewish fisherman, called Halafu. One day, they invited him to go fishing with them, and in the middle of the sea, while Halafu was swimming in pursuit of a big fish, they abandoned him. He began to drown, but after an hour and a half of fighting the stormy sea, suddenly recalled the Jewish prayer, "The Song on crossing the Red Sea", and started to recite it; by so doing, he was saved. Later, the Halafu's friends in the village prosecuted the Arab fishermen, and the court punished the Arabs severely.

Now, we hypothesized that this set of events can be organized according to two possible structures, which can roughly be described as follows: 1. "A religious miracle structure", in which the initiating event is the attempt to get the Jewish fisherman to drown, and the resolution is his salvation through prayer. 2. "Evil doers get punished" structure, in which the initiating event is the attempt to kill the Jewish fisherman, and the (main) outcome is the severe punishment meted out to the Arab fisherman by the court.

Clearly, these two structures yield different 'narrative points' of the story. Note, however, that the evaluation focus of that story marks the first of these two structures as the main structure of the story (for details see Shen, 1985). In order to test the influence of the evaluative devices on the disambiguation of this story, Shen had two groups of subjects read two different versions of the story, namely, the "story with the evaluative devices" version and the "no evaluative devices" version (which was identical to the former, save for the fact that those evaluation devices were completely removed). The subjects' task was to identify which, among two possible structures of the same story is the more central.

The findings clearly showed that subjects who read the original version, revealed a

organization that was compatible with the one signaled by the evaluation focus; in contrast, subjects who read the "story without evaluation focus" version, were less decisive in their judgment.

To conclude, these findings provide initial support for the claim that in cases of 'narrative ambiguity' the evaluation devices play a crucial role in determining the 'narrative point' of the story in question.

THEMATIC AMBIGUITY

So far for the 'narrative point'. Let us turn now to the case of 'thematic point'. In order to address this issue let us consider the following two fight stories excerpted from Labov 1972.

A   An' then, three weeks ago I had a fight with this other dude outside.

B   He got mad 'cause I wouldn't give him a cigarette.

C   Ain't that a bitch? (Oh yeah?)

D   Yeah, you know, I was sittin' on the corner an' shit, smokin' my cigarette, you know

E   I was **high**, an' **shit.**

F   He walked over to me,

G   "Can I have a cigarette?"

H   He was **a little taller** than me, **but not that much.**

I   I said, "I ain't got no more, man

J   'cause, you know, all I had was **one left.**

K   An' I ain't gon' give up my **last cigarette** unless I got some more.

L   So I said, "**I don't have no more,** man."

M   So he, you know, dug on the pack, 'cause the pack was in my pocket.

N   So he said, "Eh man, I can't get a cigarette, man?

O   **I mean – I mean** we supposed to be **brothers,** an' shit."

P   So I say, "Yeah, well, you know, man, **all I got is one, you dig it?"**

Q   **An' I won't give up my las' one to nobody.**

R   So you know, **the dude,** he looks at me,

S   An' he – I 'on' know – **he jus' thought he gon' rough that motherfucker up.**

T   He said, "**I can't get a cigarette."**

U   I said, "Tha's what I said, my man"

V   You know, so he said, "What you supposed to be **bad, an' shii?**

W   What, you think you **bad an' shit?**

X   So I said, "Look here, my man,

Y   I don't think I'm **bad,** you understand?

Z   But I mean, you know, if I had it, you could git it

AA   I like to see you with it, you **dig it?**

BB   But the **sad part** about it,

CC   You got to do without it.

DD   That's all, my man."

EE   So **the dude,** he 'on' to pushin' me, **man.** (Oh he pushed you?)

FF   **An' why he do that?**

GG   **Every time** somebody **fuck with me, why they do it?**

HH   I put that cigarette down,

II   An' boy, **let me tell you, I beat the shit outa that motherfucker.**

JJ   **I tried to kill 'im–over one cigarette!**

KK   **I tried to kill 'im. Square business**

LL   After I got through stompin' him in the face, man,

MM   You know, **all of a sudden I went crazy!**

NN   **I jus' went crazy.**

OO   An' I jus' **wouldn't stop hittin' the motherfucker.**

PP   **Dig it, I couldn't stop hittin' 'im, man,** till the teacher pulled me off o' him.

QQ   **An' guess what? After all that I gave the dude the cigarette, after all that.**

RR   **Ain't that a bitch?** (How come you gave 'im a cigarette?)

SS   I 'on' know.

TT   I jus' gave it to him.

UU   An' he smoked it, too!

The 'thematic point' of the above story can be described as the 'absurdity of the action taken', 'acting inadequately', and so forth. Thus, rather than viewing the story as the conflict between the just protagonist and his evil opponent or the villain, as is common in many fight stories– (we will present another example shortly), –the present story highlights the discrepancy between the demand of the narrator's rival for a cigarette, and the attempt to almost 'kill' him in a fight, which, ironically enough, resulted in his eventually giving the cigarette to him. So the 'point' here is that, indeed there was no 'point' in this absurd fight over a cigarette. This is a 'thematic point' in that it provides the thematic dimension (e.g., absurdity) along which the conflict between the two rivals is 'colored'.

Let us turn now to another typical fight story introduced by Labov. (What was the most important fight that you remember, one that sticks in your mind....).

a   Well, one (I think) was with a girl.

b   Like I was a kid, you know.

c   And she was the **baddest girl,** the **baddest girl** in the neighborhood.

d   If you didn't bring her candy to school, she would punch you in the mouth;

e   And you had to kiss her when she'd tell you.

f   This girl was only about 12 years old, man,

g   But she was a **killer.**

h   She **whupped** all her brothers.

i   And I came to school one day

j   and I didn't have **no money.**

k   My ma wouldn't give me **no money.**

l   And I **played hookies** one day,

n (She) put something on me.

o I **played hookies**, man,

p so I said, you know, I'm not gonna **play hookies** no more.
'cause I don't wanna get a whupping.

q So I go to school

r And this girl says, "Where's the candy?"

s I said, "I don't have it."

t She says, powww!

u So I says to myself, "There's gonna be times my mother **won't give me money** because (we're) **a poor family**

v And I can't take this all, you know, every time she don't give me **any money**."

w So I say, "Well, I just gotta fight this girl.

x She gonna hafta **whup** me,

y I hope she don't **whup** me."

z And I hit the girl: powwww!

aa and I put something on it.

bb I win the fight.

cc That was one of the most important.

Note, that here the thematic point differs radically from that of the previous one. In this story a similar conflict is described, between the narrator and the girl. The initiating event has to do with an attempt by the girl to force him to give her a candy, by threatening to beat him. He then gets into a fight with her, and wins the fight by hitting her. Note, however, that the thematic point of the story differs totally from the previous one.

Unlike the previous thematic point, which revolved around the absurdity of the fight over a cigarette, here the fight represents the battle between evil and justice, between the strong, evil oppressor and his poor, weak victim. Note that this thematic point is highlighted by the evaluation devices (some of which are emphasized in bold letters in the above text. Thus, there is a repetition of verbal expressions emphasizing the theme of the strong and evil oppressor ("the baddest girl", "killer" and "whupped"), and the poor narrator ("no money", "any money", "poor family" and so forth). Notice, that without this highlighting, the reader would find it difficult to assign a thematic point to the story.

The two stories share many similarities at various levels of description: the social background of the two narrators (adolescents from the inner city of New York); the specific context in which the two stories were told (stories elicited at the request of an experimenter); almost all the specific content details described in the story (the age of the main characters, the value and even the size of the object the two characters were fighting over, the consequences of the fight, i.e., the victory of the narrator), and so forth. Despite these similarities, however, these stories differ radically from each other, with respect to their respective thematic points. While the candy story deals with themes of injustice, and the victory of the poor, just, and

innocent over the evil oppressor, the cigarette story is about an absurd fight over a cigarette.

Clearly, these different thematic points cannot be derived from the different set of events that comprise these two stories, as these events are very similar. This points to an important characteristic of events (see also Reinhart 1995), that is, to the fact that the thematic significance is derived from a source external to the set of events in itself.

Literary critics (e.g., Perry 1985, Greimas 1966, 1971, Rimmon-Kenan 1983) generally assume that in our cultural repertoire there are various thematic dimensions or basic 'themes' (sometimes defined on the basis of semantic oppositions, such as "internal-external", "life-death", and so forth (see e.g., Rimmon-Kenan 1983, pp. 11–13, for a description of the relevant theories in this area)). These critics, however do not provide a systematic description as to how the reader is to detect the relevant thematic dimensions instantiated in a given story. This process is very intricate and complex, and far from being understood.

Given all of these considerations, then, the role played by evaluation devices becomes a crucial one. It appears that every story is open to a large number of thematic interpretations, and therefore, the narrator has to highlight certain themes rather than others. In this respect, the use of evaluation devices becomes crucial, by signaling the reader which themes are instantiated in a given story. Returning to our initial question, then, I would like to suggest that stories are open to thematic interpretation that cannot be derived from the set of events in themselves, in which case evaluation devices clearly play a central role in indicating to the reader which thematic points are relevant to the story in question.

THE AFFECTIVE POINT

In addition to the signaling of the narrative and thematic points of the story, evaluation devices play a central role at another important level of text comprehension, namely, the affective level (see Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1981). Stories induce certain affective responses in their readers, a phenomenon that has gained some interest in various theories of story comprehension (e.g., Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1981). Clearly, part of the 'point' of reading a story has to do with these affective responses.

Now, in dealing with the affective level (see e.g., Tan, 1994; Oatley, 1994; Davis & Andringa, 1995), a major distinction that has been drawn between 'artefact' (or artistic) and 'Fiction' (or non-artistic') emotional responses.

Artistic emotional responses are the result of certain manipulations on part of the author of the narrative, such as particular arrangements of the text continuum, arousing affective responses like suspense or surprise. This type of response has been investigated, experimentally, by various theories of story comprehension. Notably, Brewer & Lichtenstein (1981) have developed the 'structural-affect' theory of stories, which addresses this issue. According to their theory, stories are designed for entertainment, a function carried out by eliciting particular affective states in the reader (e.g., suspense, surprise, curiosity). These types of affective responses are produced by the inclusion of certain types of events and by particular arrangements of the discourse form with

respect to the underlying events. In sum, the "point" of a given story is defined here in terms of the affects it gives rise to in their readers' minds.

The other type of responses, namely, 'Fiction', or "world" type responses do not necessarily involve artistic manipulation on the part of the narrator, but, rather, rely on the very content of the story (See e.g., Tan, 1994; Oatley, 1994; Davis & Andringa, 1995; for a detailed discussion of this distinction). Thus, typical 'Fiction' or 'World' emotional responses that stories may invoke are anger, sympathy for the protagonist(s), disgust, and similar responses which reflect the readers' reaction towards the events and characters described in the story world.

Note, however, that most studies of these two types of emotional responses to stories (e.g., Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1981) have not related the affective responses to evaluation devices. For example, according to the 'structural affect' theory of Brewer & Lichtenstein (1981), the affects are produced by manipulating the order of presentation of the events, while affective responses of the 'world' or 'non-artistic' type, are assumed to be induced the events depicted in the story.

Following Reinhart (1995), it should be emphasized that evaluation devices play a central role in this respect as well.

Labov, for example, suggests that "The narrators of most of these stories were under social pressure to show that the events involved were truly dangerous and unusual, or that someone else really broke the normal rules in an outrageous and reportable way. Evaluation devices say to us; this was terrifying, dangerous, weird, wild, crazy, or amusing, hilarious, wonderful... " (371). Here we can see that at least part of the function of the evaluative devices is to signal and create certain 'non artistic' or 'world' type **affects** in the recipients of the respective stories.

So, we see that evaluative devices signal and create affect-states in the reader, a function which is also conceived of in terms of the signaling of the story 'point'.

Furthermore, it has been noted (see e.g., Reinhart, 1995) that evaluative devices tend to concentrate around "an evaluation focus", typically, between the complicating event of the story and its resolution. This may induce certain affective responses on part of the reader, and in particular, suspense (see also Labov, 1972).

SUMMARY

Several conclusions can be drawn from the previous discussion. The first conclusion concerns the relation between the "surface" or "expression" level of the story text (to which the evaluation devices belong) and the "deeper" or underlying structural organization (at which the 'point' of story resides). For most theories of narrative and stories (at least within the 'structuralist' tradition, but also within other frameworks of research) these two levels are divorced from each other in that the event organization is independent from its verbal realization: the same story can be realized in many ways, and, in fact, in many mediums, while still remaining the 'same' story. Prince, for example, states explicitly: "A grammar of stories does not have to be concerned with the description of the expression side of the stories" (1973: 13).

So the "story", 'point' is also constructed by the reader as was previously suggested.

In contrast, the present article has pointed out some of the major roles played by evaluation devices (which form part of the "expression" level of the story text), in signaling and establishing the various aspects of the 'point' of the story (which is part of the deeper, constructed aspect of the text).

This analysis supports the view that those elements which functionally contribute to the signaling of the story point are, by no means, redundant or marginal, but rather constitute a central part of the event-organization.

Let me also point out that, as a single linguistic-textual set of devices, evaluation devices play a unique role in coordinating various major subprocesses of story comprehension. Thus, evaluation devices play a key role at the 'lower' level of event hierarchical organization, namely, the identification of the 'narrative center' of the events in the story; they also play a key role at a higher level, namely that of identification of the thematic center of the story in question; and, finally, they direct the readers' affective responses towards the story events. One can hardly point to another linguistic-textual set of devices that fulfills such a variety of central functions in story comprehension.

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11. ON INTERPRETING: A TUTORIAL

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INTRODUCTION

How do we make sense of discourse? How do we home in on the point a speaker is trying to get across. How do we detect a stance[1]? In the following examples (1 and 2), it is rather easy to come up with an interpretation: The stance made explicit at the end of the text provides for a guideline. It tells us how to conceive of the 'brute facts' presented earlier. For instance, in (1), the explicit stance is that of gratification. It makes us view the speaker as endorsing the simplicity and minimalism of the elements described. In (2), however, the explicit stance is that of dismay. The objects described here are presented as dissatisfying – as devoid of human warmth and feelings. The highly similar texts thus convey different points, depending on the evaluation of the facts described:

(1) Clear water in a brilliant bowl,
Pink and white carnations ...

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[1] *Stance* is defined by Du Bois (2002) as:
• "a public act by a social actor,
• achieved through overt means,
• of evaluation, positioning, and alignment
• with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural landscape".

"...*evaluation* is the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer's *attitude* or *stance* towards, *viewpoint* on, or *feelings* about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about" (Thompson & Hunston, 2000: 5 cited in Du Bois, 2002, emphasis added).